For Better Or For Worse

The way I see it, a teacher has to be an entertainer. You gotta have expression, be excited about your subject — I mean, if you sound bored, they'll be bored, savvy?

Move around the room! Explain stuff clearly, imaginatively, and with a sense of humor!

I love the guys who are keen and expressive, man, like — I stay awake, I get pumped! I get into it, and I really wanna learn!

I had a prof like that, once.
Teaching and the Big Five:

Or, What I've Learned from a Dozen Years on Teaching Award Committees
Why are attitudes toward teaching and education often so negative?
“Universities are full of knowledge; the freshmen bring a little in and the seniors take none away, and knowledge accumulates.”
- Abbott Lawrence Lowell
Education is “one of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought.”
- Bertrand Russell
Colleges are “places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed.”
- Robert G. Ingersoll
“I never have let my schooling interfere with my education.”
- Mark Twain
“He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.”
- George Bernard Shaw
Yet these complaints are not totally justified.
There are university teachers who make positive contributions to the education of their students.
But what are they like?
How about a theory based on the Big Five personality factors!
The Big Five Personality Factors

I: Extraversion (Surgency, Power)
II: Agreeableness (Likeability, Love)
III: Conscientiousness (Task Interest/Work)
IV: Neuroticism (Emotional Instability, Affect)
V: Openness to Experience (Culture, Intellect)
Corresponding ACL Adjectives (John, 1990):
Factor I: Extraversion

- Talkative, Assertive, Active, Energetic, Outgoing, Outspoken, Dominant, Forceful, Enthusiastic, Show-off, Sociable, Spunky, Adventurous, Noisy, Bossy

- versus Quiet, Reserved, Shy, Silent, Withdrawn, Retiring
Factor II: Agreeableness

Sympathetic, Kind, Appreciative, Affectionate, Soft-hearted, Warm, Generous, Trusting, Helpful, Forgiving, Pleasant, Good-natured, Friendly, Cooperative, Gentle, Unselfish, Praising, Sensitive

versus Fault-finding, Cold, Unfriendly, Quarrelsome, Hard-hearted, Unkind, Cruel, Thankless
Factor III: Conscientiousness

- Organized, Thorough, Planful, Efficient, Responsible, Reliable, Dependable, Conscientious, Precise, Practical, Deliberate, Painstaking

- versus Careless, Disorderly, Frivolous, Irresponsible, Slipshod, Undependable, Forgetful
Factor IV: Neuroticism

- Tense, Anxious, Nervous, Moody, Worrying, Touchy, Fearful, High-strung, Self-pitying, Temperamental, Unstable, Self-punishing, Despondent, Emotional

versus [Emotional stability, Emotional control, Ego strength]
Factor V: Openness to Experience

- Wide interests, Imaginative, Intelligent, Original, Insightful, Curious, Sophisticated, Artistic, Clever, Inventive, Sharp-witted, Ingenious, Wise

- versus Commonplace, Narrow interests, Simple, Shallow, Unintelligent
The Hypothesis:

Teaching Excellence Associated with

- High Extraversion,
- High Agreeableness,
- High Conscientiousness, and
- High Openness, but
- Low Neuroticism
Testing the Hypothesis

- Psychometric
- Observational
Psychometric

- Correlate personality and student ratings
- e.g., Rushton, Murray, & Paunonen (1983):
- The effective teacher is
- liberal, sociable (I), showing leadership (I), extraverted (I), non-anxious (III), objective, supporting (II), non-authoritarian, non-defensive (III), intelligent (V), and aesthetically sensitive (V)
Observational

- Infer the traits from prototypical behaviors observed in highly successful (award winning) teachers
- However, because the Big Five consists of bipolar personality dimensions
- The inversion of the hypothesis can be tested by looking at notably unsuccessful teachers
In other words, the traditional methodological and didactic strategy of ...
Goofus roughhouses indoors, which causes him to hyperventilate.

Gallant practices Vedic shallow breathing to conserve his family’s oxygen allotment.
Philosophical Question:

1. Is Evil the absence of Good, like shadows in the light?
2. Or, is Evil an active negative force?
3. If the latter, then the average teacher might occupy the mean between extremes, i.e.,
   - bad teachers have to do something to be considered bad,
   - something like the Darwin Awards
The Three Teaching Types:

- *Professor Magnificent* (Outstanding, Excellent, Superb): Positive Teaching
- *Professor Ignoteriorious* (Outrageous, Scandalous, Horrid, Horrible, Appalling, Terrible): Negative Teaching
- *Professor Quotidian* (Ordinary, Commonplace, Mediocre): Neutral Teaching
Data Sources:

- Positive Behaviors
- Negative Behaviors
Positive Behaviors: Committees

- Distinguished Teaching Award
- UC Davis Prize
- TEAM (Teaching Excellence and Merit)
- Chancellor’s Teaching Fellowship
- Teaching Awards for Outstanding Graduate Students
- Academic Federation Distinguished Teaching Awards
Negative Behaviors:

- Committees
  - College Personnel
  - Academic Personnel
  - UCAP
  - Ad Hoc Promotion

- Research: Perlman and McCann (1998) study of “Student Pet Peeves about Teaching”
Will Emphasize the Positive
Why? Because ...

- Teaching excellence is what we all *should* aspire to (whether we do or not)
- The talk would become a real downer, causing depression or anger
- The really bad teachers form a more heterogeneous group: “All happy families resemble each other, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Leo Tolstoy)
Disclaimer:

- To preserve the anonymity of the more infamous of my university colleagues, I will randomly change
  - gender
  - discipline
- whether they deserve it or not!
Factor I: Extraversion

The Best Teachers

- Initiate and maintain communication at every possible opportunity (e.g., before-class chats)
- Project a forceful, enthusiastic, persuasive style (e.g., “pep talks”)
- Stimulate active interaction during the lecture hour (e.g., “show of hands”)
- Display involvement in extracurricular activities on behalf of the students
Factor I: Extraversion

The Worst Teachers

- Minimize social interaction as much as possible (e.g., habitually arriving late and leaving early)
- Speak in a nearly inaudible monotone: “A professor is one who talks in someone else’s sleep” (W. H. Auden)
- Avoid eye-contact as much as possible
- Reduce the amount of in-class instruction by delivering abbreviated lectures or by “putting the lectures on the web”
Problem: High extraversion can be negative if it means that the professor is confrontational and domineering - the “in your face” instructor. Hence the need to couple it with the next factor:
Factor II: Agreeableness

The Best Teachers

- Develop welcoming course websites with an attractive look and interesting links
- Introduce themselves before the first day of class by sending a “warm and fuzzy” to everyone enrolled
- Learn students’ names and use them at every opportunity
- Hold liberal and flexible office hours, even adopting the “open door” policy
Factor II: Agreeableness

The Worst Teachers

- Make it known early how much they hate teaching and would rather be making more constructive use of their valuable time
- Hold minimal office hours at inconvenient times that are often canceled without notice
- Respond to questions in a hostile, intimidating manner, both in class and during office hours ("What’s your problem? “Didn’t get it the first time?”")
Many “pet peeves” of this type (Perlman & McCann, 1998):

- Representative complaints
  - “Intellectual arrogance/talk down”
  - “Don’t respect students”
  - “Not approachable, unhelpful”
  - “Intolerant of questions”
  - “Forced class participation”
  - “Insensitive to student’s time constraints”
  - “Too much work”

- Hence, they can’t apply the “Golden” or “Silver” Rule
Problem: Agreeable extraversion not sufficient either; the “nice guy/gal, but can’t teach” phenomenon because he or she violates the students’ expectations about the instructor’s responsibilities
Factor III: Conscientiousness

The Best Teachers

- Prepare the course well before the onset of classes (textbook, syllabus, website, etc.)
- Extensively plan and rehearse for each lecture (including audiovisuals)
- Are careful and methodical in the preparation of examination materials, even when using textbook-prepared questions
Factor III: Conscientiousness

The Worst Teachers

- Make woefully incompetent textbook choices
- Prepare horribly inadequate syllabi, if they do so at all
- Come totally unprepared for lectures
- Display the most minimal regard for test construction or the evaluation of test performance
Other “pet peeves” of this type (Perlman & McCann, 1998):

- “Poor organization/planning”
- “Poor testing procedures/exams”
- “Poor use of class time (coming late, stopping early)”
- “Poor syllabus”
Problem: Conscientiousness can go too far, however, if it has any hint of obsessive-compulsive behavior, a possible manifestation of ...
Factor IV: Neuroticism

The Worst Teachers

- May display extreme anxiety, even to the point of incapacitating panic attacks
- May display hypochondria or various other obsessive complaints
- May display extreme ego-defensiveness so that the smallest question becomes a major personal challenge that must be nipped in the bud
- May display extremely inflexible and black-and-white attitudes and behavior
Factor IV: Neuroticism

The Best Teachers

- Relaxed, easy-going even under unexpected surprises or mistakes
- Not defensive, even in response to deliberately hostile students
- Flexible, within the limits of instructor responsibilities
Teachers who are extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and non-neurotic are very good teachers, but to be a truly great teacher requires one thing more ...
Factor V: Openness to Experience

The Worst Teachers

- Insist on an extremely narrow treatment of the subject with respect to the choice of textbook and lecture topics
- Respond negatively to student questions that try to make connections to the outside world
Another Pet Peeve (Perlman & McCann, 1998):

- “Don’t relate material to real life”
- “Control/impose views”
Factor V: Openness to Experience

The Best Teachers

- Make constant connections between course topics and ideas in other courses and disciplines
- Make ample use of cartoons, newspaper clippings, websites, movies, TV shows, songs, T-shirts, and ties to make connections to the world outside the classroom
Q.E.D.
Final Issues

- How are these conclusions influenced by course type?
- How are these conclusions affected by the instructor’s age?
- How are these conclusions affected by the instructor’s research productivity?
- How are these conclusions influenced by the instructor’s personal disposition?
How are these conclusions influenced by course type?

- Substantive versus methodological courses
- Large lecture versus seminar courses
- Graduate versus undergraduate courses
How are these conclusions affected by age?

- Age and teaching evaluations
- Age and administrative responsibilities
- Age and personal disposition
How are these conclusions affected by productivity?

- Although teaching and research are antithetical in terms of
  - Attitude
  - Time

- They are orthogonal with respect to
  - Performance
  - Personality
How are these conclusions influenced by disposition?

- Dispositional attributions
- Behavior > personality
- Conscientiousness as the key
THE WAY I SEE IT, A TEACHER HAS TO BE AN ENTERTAINER. YOU GOTTA HAVE EXPRESSION! BE EXCITED ABOUT YOUR SUBJECT— I MEAN, IF YOU SOUND BORED, THEY'LL BE BORED, SAVVY?

MOVE AROUND THE ROOM! EXPLAIN STUFF CLEARLY, IMAGINATIVELY, AN' WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR!

I LOVE THE GUYS WHO ARE KEEN AN' EXPRESSIVE, MAN, LIKE— I STAY AWAKE, I GET PUMPED! I GET INTO IT, AN' I REALLY WANNA LEARN!

I HAD A PROF LIKE THAT, ONCE.
And so the bartender says, "Hey! That's not a duck!"
(Wait for laughter)
Four score and seven years ago our forefathers
fought a new nation, liberty and the truth.